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INTERSTATE MIGRATION OF NEGRO POPULATION

For a clear understanding of the northern migration of Negroes in the years 1916 and 1917, a knowledge of the general movement of the Negro population since 1865 will prove very useful. Several recent writers have been prone to emphasize the development in the Negro within the past two years of "a sudden desire to move," but a little investigation soon reveals the fact that the black man, ever since the day of his emancipation, has shown a tendency to migrate.

At the close of the Civil War, when told that he was free, the Negro at once began to put his freedom to the test; and as the most palpable evidence of his liberty was his ability to come and go as he chose, it was only natural that he should begin to move about. At the end of every year thousands of tenants in the southern black belts may still be seen removing to other farms, in many cases without even taking the pains to examine beforehand the lands they are to cultivate or the houses they are to occupy. Such migrations do not appear in the census returns, but their social and economic importance is far-reaching. Dr. Booker T. Washington often found it necessary to urge his people to abandon their moving propensities and to settle down and acquire property. At gatherings of Negro farmers he was fond of narrating a homely story of a chicken which belonged to one of these peripatetic tenants and which, from long-acquired habit, would walk up to its owner's cabin door on every first of January and squat down and offer its legs to be tied, preparatory to its journey to the next farm.

The possibility of the migration of a great number of freedmen from some sections of the South became evident almost as soon as the Civil War was over, and as early as November 27, 1866, Governor James L. Orr, of South Carolina, stated in a message to the legislature that the Negroes were—

invaluable to the productive resources of the State, and if their labor be lost by removal to other sections, it will convert thousands of acres of productive land into a dreary wilderness. For this reason, I have felt it to be my duty

to discourage their migration. The short crops of the present year should stimulate the planter and farmer to renewed energy and enterprise. He will, however, find his lands of little value if he cannot command labor to cultivate them. If the Negro remain here, his labor must be made sufficiently remunerative to subsist and clothe him comfortably. Schools must be established to educate his children, and churches built for his moral training.¹

This threatened migration, to which Governor Orr referred, was a westward movement, from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. It differed materially from the later migration to the North. In general, the westward movement in our country is actuated by causes similar to those that prompt European migration to America. It is a movement from a highly developed, densely populated region, where the economic stress is acute, to a region more sparsely populated, with undeveloped resources, where the struggle for existence is not so keen. This explains the lure of the Southwest for the Negro, as well as that of all the West for the white man. But there is another movement of population that operates in a manner quite the reverse of the principles just enunciated. This is the cityward movement, a migration to a region of denser population, keener competition, and more acute economic stress. Such a movement is the northern exodus of Negroes in 1916-17.

In the late sixties and early seventies the westward migration of Negroes attained considerable headway. It was at first a movement of individuals and soon became one of groups. Railway and land companies carefully fostered it and had their agents in various sections of the South, very much as trans-Atlantic steamship companies have maintained their runners in the remote rural districts of Southern and Eastern Europe to encourage emigration to America. A well-known Negro educator states that in 1874 he heard one of these agents boast that he had induced 35,000 persons in South Carolina and Georgia to leave for Arkansas and Texas.² This westward movement, however, was soon dwarfed into insignificance by a threatened migration on an unprecedented scale to

¹ South Carolina *House Journal* (1866), pp. 20-21.

² W. H. Crogman, *Talks for the Times* (Atlanta, 1896), p. 54. The agent's statement is probably much exaggerated, but there must have been a considerable migration to have prompted him to make such a claim.

Kansas from the lower Mississippi Valley early in the spring of 1879. The "Kansas Exodus," as it came to be called from its alleged resemblance to the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, presents several striking analogies to the movement of 1916-17. When the exodus to Kansas began, there was the same suspicion, as noted in 1916, that it was the result of efforts to colonize Negro voters in the North and make certain states safely Republican. In both cases this suspicion was finally allayed. There were also, in 1879 as in 1916, the assumption by a portion of the northern press that the Negro was fleeing north to escape ill treatment, and the tendency on its part to lecture the South for its shortcomings in dealing with the black man. One may also note, in both instances, the same sort of uneasiness among the planters in those districts from which emigration had been excessive, the same assurance by some that all of the Negroes would eventually return, and the same introspective editorials in southern newspapers, with the candid admission that conditions might be better for the Negro, but with the added assertion that even as things were the South was a better place for him than the North. In both instances also may be observed the final recognition that the causes of the movement were basically economic. Of course, there are certain contrasts as well as parallels in these two movements, but the latter appear to be by far the more significant.

The Kansas movement of 1879 was due in large measure to the agricultural depression in the lower Mississippi Valley, but it was precipitated by the activities of a host of petty Negro leaders who sprang up in all parts of the South during the period of reconstruction. Foremost among these were Benjamin (better known as "Pap") Singleton, of Tennessee, and Henry Adams, of Louisiana. Singleton styled himself the "Moses of the Exodus" and personally supervised the planting of several colonies in Kansas.¹ Adams claimed to have organized a colonization council which attained a membership of 98,000.²

The exodus to the "Promised Land" of Kansas began early in March, 1879, and continued until May. The total number of emi-

¹ W. L. Fleming, "'Pap' Singleton: The Moses of the Colored Exodus," *American Journal of Sociology*, XV, 61-82.

² *Senate Report*, 693, Part II, Forty-sixth Congress, Second Session.

grants, most of whom went to Kansas from Louisiana and Mississippi, has been estimated at all the way from 5,000 to 10,000, and many thousands more had planned to move, but were deterred by the misfortunes of those who constituted the vanguard. Leaving their homes when the weather was becoming warm, the early emigrants reached Kansas when spring chanced to be unusually backward and the country was still bleak and desolate. Thinly clad and often without funds, they endured much suffering from want and sickness, and many of them became public charges. Societies were organized expressly to care for the "refugees," as they were called, and large numbers returned to their homes as soon as they were able, giving such dismal reports on their arrival as to dissuade others from following their example. Perhaps a third of the emigrants remained, and many of these eventually attained a fair degree of prosperity.

The movement was ill-advised, and too much based on the Negro's sentimentalism. To him Kansas, pictured as the home of John Brown and the scene of many free-soil victories, seemed to be the ideal home for the black man. But he found on arriving a harsh climate, pioneer conditions, and small farmers who had no need of extra laborers and who were not especially friendly to the Negro. That individuals from among this group of emigrants could surmount such difficulties and attain no small degree of well-being, is to the credit of the race. While the exodus caused much suffering, demoralization, and loss of property among the emigrants, it seems to have had at least one good result. In some instances it is said to have caused an improvement in the condition of the Negroes who remained at home. In communities where there had been considerable emigration there was said to have been a tendency to reduce rents and to offer the remaining tenants more favorable terms in general than had obtained prior to the exodus. Such a result would naturally be expected.

In 1888-89 there was a considerable migration of Negroes from southern Alabama to Arkansas and Texas, as a result of the activities of labor agents.¹ The rapid development of the mining industry of Alabama in the nineties caused a rapid influx of Negroes into the mineral regions around Birmingham, and was the cause of much

¹ *Southern Farmer*, Atlanta, Ga., June, 1889.

uneasiness among the cotton growers of the black belt. The advent of the boll weevil caused a great migration of colored farmers in 1908-9 from the cotton fields to the cane fields of Louisiana. By 1914 the cotton belt of this state had recovered from the demoralization that followed the advent of the weevil; and the sugar planters, depressed by the prospects of free sugar, were reducing their acreage and employing fewer laborers. A tendency toward a counter-migration then showed itself, and labor agents again were active.¹

These instances are cited in order to indicate that the northern migration of 1916-17 is no new and strange phenomenon. It differs from earlier movements chiefly in the matter of numbers involved. The European war has simply hastened and intensified a movement that has been under way for half a century. To the truth of this statement the reports of the census bear eloquent witness. In 1860 there were 344,719 Negroes in the North; in 1910 there were 1,078,336, an increase of 212.8 per cent for the fifty-year period. In the South for the same period the rate of increase was 111.1 per cent. In the last half-century, therefore, the relative increase of Negroes in the North has been nearly double that in the South. This shows a decided change from the conditions prevailing before the Civil War. At every census before 1860, except that of 1840, the Negro population of the South showed a greater relative increase than that of the North. Since 1860, however, the situation has been reversed, as is indicated by the following table:

PERCENTAGE OF INCREASE OF NEGRO POPULATION

Decade	North	South	Decade	North	South
1790-1800.....	24.1	34.0	1850-1860.....	20.3	22.1
1800-1810.....	18.7	39.2	1860-1870.....	[33.3]*	[8.8]*
1810-1820.....	18.0	29.5	1870-1880.....	[30.5]*	[34.7]*
1820-1830.....	29.2	31.6	1880-1890.....	16.2	13.5
1830-1840.....	38.9	22.2	1890-1900.....	25.1	17.2
1840-1850.....	23.7	26.8	1900-1910.....	18.3	10.4

*Owing to the great irregularities in the census of 1870, especially as it relates to the Southern states, comparisons of this year with those of 1860 and 1880 are wholly misleading, and in the foregoing table the percentages for these years are bracketed.

¹ New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, March 26, 1914.

It thus appears that in every decade since the Civil War the Negro population of the North has been growing faster than that of the South. This increase can be accounted for in two ways only: by an excess of births over deaths, and by immigration from other states. The meager vital statistics available indicate that while the death-rate of the Negro in the North is lower than that of the Negro in the South, the birth-rate of the northern Negro is also lower and is just barely sufficient to balance the death-rate. The increase in the colored population of the Northern states appears therefore to be due almost wholly to immigration. The census fully substantiates this assumption. In 1910, 415,533 northern Negroes were southern-born. This is nearly two-fifths of the entire Negro population living in the North. Forty-seven per cent of the Negroes living in New England in 1910 and more than 50 per cent of those in the Middle Atlantic and East North Central divisions¹ were born outside these sections. In four of the former slave states (Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee) there were actually fewer Negroes in 1910 than in 1900. These, it will be noted, are border states, where "the call of the North" is most likely to be first heard and heeded, and whence migration is easier and cheaper than it is farther south. It is also worthy of note that every one of the former slave states except Arkansas was "whiter" in 1910 than in 1900.² Indeed, if we exclude from our reckoning states having a Negro population of less than 2 per cent, the only states in the Union that became perceptibly "blackier" in the last census decade were West Virginia, whose percentage increased from 4.5 to 5.3, and Oklahoma, whose increase was from 7 to 8.3 per cent. The increase in these states, however, is not large enough to give rise to problems like those in some sections of the old South.

It is interesting to note that the New England states, before 1910, were not appreciably affected by the northern migration. In three of these states (Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New

¹ The Middle Atlantic and East North Central divisions comprise the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

² While the percentage of Negro population in Arkansas increased, it was only to the extent of one-tenth of 1 per cent.

Hampshire) the percentage of Negro population between 1880 and 1910 actually declined, in Maine it remained stationary, and in Vermont and Massachusetts it showed a very slight increase. New Hampshire actually contained fewer Negroes in 1910 than in 1790.

Another very interesting feature of the movement of Negroes in the United States is the fact that, in spite of the northward tendencies just described, the center of Negro population has been shifting steadily southward and westward. Since 1790 the center has changed from southern Virginia to northeastern Alabama. This is due to the fact that the drift of Negro population to the North before 1910 was most pronounced in the border states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri, and that the increase in the states farther south more than offset the losses in these four states.

The Negro shows a tendency, not only to move northward, but also to move about very freely within the South. In fact, the region registering the largest net gain of Negroes in 1910 from this interstate movement was the West South Central division (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas), which showed a gain from this source of 194,658. The Middle Atlantic division came second with a gain of 186,384, and the East North Central third with a gain of 119,649. On the other hand, the South Atlantic states showed a loss of 392,827, and the East South Central states a loss of 200,876 from interstate migration. While the Negroes have shown this marked inclination toward interstate movement, they nevertheless exhibit this tendency in less degree than do the whites. In 1910, 16.6 per cent of the Negroes had moved to some other state than that in which they were born, while the percentage for the whites was 22.4. For the relative extent of intrastate migration by the two races, figures are of course unavailable.

As has already been indicated, the cause of the migration, like that of practically all great movements of peoples, is fundamentally economic. But this simple statement does not tell the whole story. The causes may be grouped as *beckoning* and *driving*, the first group arising from conditions in the North and the second from conditions in the South. Among the beckoning causes in 1916-17 were high

wages, little or no unemployment, a shorter working day than on the farm, less political and social discrimination than in the South, better educational facilities, and the lure of the city. Among the driving causes were the relatively low wages paid farm labor, an unsatisfactory tenant or crop-sharing system, the boll weevil, the crop failures of 1916, lynching, disfranchisement, segregation, poor schools, and the monotony, isolation, and drudgery of farm life. There is a noticeable tendency on the part of some Negro leaders to attribute the movement chiefly to the unrest due to mob violence and other ills, social and political, that fall to the lot of the black man. When we note, however, that lynching for the past twenty-five years has been slowly but surely decreasing and that disfranchisement is no new thing, but has been an accomplished fact for more than forty years, it becomes evident that, whatever grievances of this nature the Negro may have against the South, he has at least no *new* complaint and therefore no stronger reason for migrating on this account in 1917 than he has had for several decades. If adverse social and political conditions are the main cause of the northern migration, it is asked, why did the Negro not go in the eighties and nineties when lynchings were four times as frequent as they now are and when disfranchisement was effected by "bulldozing" and tissue ballots rather than by the more peaceful method of constitutional amendment? The answer to this question is that the Negro has no greater grievances now than formerly, but that he has a much better opportunity for escaping these grievances than he has had heretofore. The driving causes in the South are not of themselves sufficient to bring about such an exodus as was recently observed. There must be an avenue of escape to apparently better conditions, and this was presented when the European war created a vacuum in the northern labor market.

The effects of this interstate migration, like the effects of late foreign immigration, are largely matters of the future. But certain postulates with regard to the immediate effects may be readily formulated. So far as the migrations tend to bring about an equilibration of demand and supply in the labor markets of this country, the effect will be beneficial. The abundance of crude, cheap, and easily managed labor in the cotton belt has not been

an unmixed blessing. It is a well-established fact, too, that the Negro does better in those districts where he is greatly outnumbered by the whites than he does in the black belts where he has little chance to study and emulate the white man's skill, thrift, and energy. The Negroes who go north may thus increase their own productive capacity, and at the same time, by relieving somewhat the congestion of black folk in their old homes, may improve the economic status of their neighbors who remain behind. A migration of Negroes in any number is likely also to affect the attitude of the southern employer of colored labor. It will tend to impress him with the idea of the black man's economic value as he had not been impressed before. The exodus of 1879 effected such a change of attitude on the part of the Mississippi River planters. A large number of them assembled in Vicksburg on May 5, 1879, and solemnly resolved "that the colored race has been placed by the Constitution of the United States, and the states here represented, on a plane of absolute legal equality with the white race," and "that the colored race shall be accorded the practical enjoyment of all rights, civil and political, guaranteed by the said constitutions and laws."¹

The migration has also its debit side. As already stated, it is a cityward movement of a rural population, and as such is attended with all the difficulties and dangers incident to such a movement on the part of any people. But there are additional difficulties when the newcomers to a city—even a northern city—chance to be colored. They must live in the least desirable part of the town, on filthy and neglected streets, and in poorly constructed, insanitary dwellings, for which they must frequently pay exorbitant rentals. There may be the additional handicap of industrial discrimination on account of race.

Dr. W. H. Croghan, of Clark University, Atlanta, Georgia, a well-known Negro educator, twenty years ago set forth the evils of this movement in the following words:

Nothing was ever clearer to my mind than that this interstate migration has in it the seeds of moral death. It is a very Pandora's box. It strikes at the roots of those things by which only any people can hope to rise. It

¹ *Vicksburg Daily Commercial*, May 6, 1879.

destroys the home wherever it is established, and prevents its establishment where it is not. It retards the progress of education and acts like a withering blight upon the influence of the churches. . . . Over and over again have I known persons to leave their native state and after wandering through several others to return finally to the very spot whence they had started, having in that time gained nothing, acquired nothing, except that which is a property common to all bodies once set in motion—a tendency to keep moving.¹

This statement, in the light of later developments, appears unduly pessimistic, and would probably be modified by its author today; but the fact cannot be gainsaid that the mere removal of the Negro to another environment is not the ultimate solution of what we call the “race problem”; at the most it can only modify the problem. As the European peasant does not escape all his economic ills when he stands for the first time under the Stars and Stripes, so the Negro will still have his troubles after crossing the Mason and Dixon line.

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¹ *Talks for the Times*, pp. 253-54.